



VERN FISHER/The Herald

General contractor Shawn Bakker, left, and Raymond Sison work on a remodel in Pebble Beach on Tuesday.

An occasional series chronicling local businesses that continue to be successful in challenging economic times.



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By LANE WALLACE
Herald Staff Writer

Until the recession hit, Shawn Bakker didn't have to worry about drumming up construction business.

"I'd just go from one job to to next. . . I'd never had a sign on the truck," said Bakker, 31, who moved to Salinas three years ago from his native Colorado.

But construction work suddenly dried up in 2008, and when 2009 hit, Bakker went "four or five months without anything."

Bakker said he realized that "I want to stop reacting to the economy. I want to be proactive."

Now, Bakker is doing well at a time when building is still slow. His company — there's a Bakker Construction sign on the pickup now — is focusing on remodeling. More than half of his business is remodeling foreclosed properties, and he

has three full-time employees.

He's telling clients about a Federal Housing Administration program that Bakker didn't know about before getting into remodeling. It's a 203K loan, in which the cost of remodeling can be included in a 3.5 percent FHA loan.

Bakker credits several factors for his success. He joined a networking group, was able to get a \$20,000 loan last year to get his business started, and gets advice from the Small Business Development Center in Gonzales.

Bakker said he was asked to join the fledgling Salinas chapter of Business Networking International by Brian Smoot, a chiropractor.

Bakker said that when he first declined, Smoot said "I'll find another contractor."

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Shawn Bakker
general contractor

BUILDER FINDS A NICHE

CONTRACTOR FOCUSES ON REMODELING, FORECLOSURES

Home Buyer Education Opportunity

► The Central Coast Home Professionals will present a free seminar on buying and remodeling homes in a down economy at 10 a.m. Saturday at Holiday Inn Express, 195 Kern St., Salinas. More information is available at 784-2428.

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Bakker quickly said he'd join.

The 35-member group has no more than one person per occupation. Bakker said he's gotten several referrals from within the group, and he's organized an offshoot, a 12-member group called the Central Coast Home Professionals.



Bakker

Being in the network is not a guarantee of referrals — Bakker said members must still demonstrate their reliability to each other. Integrity, he said, is something “that shows really quickly.”

Getting a loan in a down economy wasn't easy. Bakker had been in the Denver area all his life before coming here with his wife, the former Amanda Given, who is from Salinas. She helps with the business's office work.

Some banks told him he hadn't been in California long enough, even though he was a fourth-generation contractor.

Pinnacle Bank couldn't make the loan, but helped Bakker hook up with California Rural Development Corp. in Salinas, which loans money to businesses and farms.

The \$20,000 loan, for four years at less than 4 percent, helped Bakker get through his first project — the money doesn't come in before the work — and a little capital for other business expenses.

Bakker has a degree in communications and psychology from Regis University in Denver. Those skills are helpful when dealing with people, but Bakker didn't consider getting out of construction.

It was about “taking ownership of what I know,” said Bakker, who is looking into expanding further.

Bakker Construction can be reached at 206-3034.